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BECOMING AN OUTDOORS-WOMAN

A special section of The Mining Journal

Accepting a challenge

Women push boundaries in Michigan Department of Natural Resources program

By JACKIE STARK
Journal Staff Writer

BIG BAY — Atlanta resident Jeannie McKenzie was feeling apprehensive as she stepped onto the dog sled, one foot holding down the brake while she pulled up the snow hook.

The four-dog team barked in anticipation, lunging against their harnesses until Chatham musher Terri Grout, who was sitting in the sled, yelled "Hike, hike hike," and the dogs took off.

McKenzie may have been nervous on the way out, but just a few minutes later, she led the dogs back to the starting point with a smile on her face.

"It's very quiet and peaceful," she said of being on the trail with the team. "All you hear is the dogs breathing. It's very, very peaceful."

McKenzie learned how to lead a team of sled dogs during the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' twice-annual Becoming an Outdoors-Woman event.

BOW programs can be found in almost every state in the country. Open to women 18 and older, the program offers women a way to try new activities in a welcoming, judgment-free atmosphere. They typically run for three days and offer a number of classes for women to choose from, each taught by an expert in the

field and each catered to beginners.

Grout, who owns Four Legs Good! Kennel in Chatham and is a 21-year-veteran of the sport, has been an instructor at Michigan BOW programs for years, allowing participants to try their hands at mushing.

"(Sled dogs aren't) something I would really have access to," said McKenzie, who works for the DNR, fixing fire equipment. "I spend all my time driving and working. I'm around guys a lot of the time. I work with guys, so it's kind of nice to go do something with some gals."

McKenzie was one of 68 women who signed up to participate in the three-day event, which took place at Bay Cliff Health Camp in Big Bay.

This year's winter BOW, which ran from Feb. 22-24, offered 16 different classes, from ice fishing to wood burning to cross country skiing, and everything in between.

The idea, according to organizer and DNR employee Sharon Pitz, is to build up women's confidence and get them outside, trying new things.

The events have even benefited Pitz, who takes class-

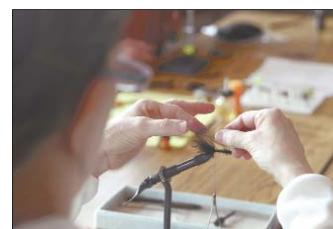
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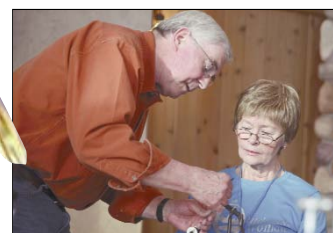
Bernadette Harkness, a chemistry professor at downstate Delta College, displays a northern pike she caught Feb. 23. (Photo courtesy of Bernadette Harkness)

All tied up in knots

Making flies with expert instruction



Above, Suzanne Tietjen of Wetmore learns how to tie fishing flies while participating in the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in Michigan event at Bay Cliff Health Camp in Big Bay on Feb. 23. Below, instructor Ken Snyder helps Sarah Stenfors learn the art of fly tying. (Journal photos by Matt Keiser)



Above is a close-up view of the instruments used to tie flies (Journal photo by Matt Keiser)

By JACKIE STARK
Journal Staff Writer

BIG BAY — With 68 women converging on the Bay Cliff Health Camp for a three-day foray into all things outdoors, seeing a man on campus is a little unusual.

Most of the instructors at Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in Michigan events are women. But a few men can be found here and there on campus as well, teaching women about ice fishing, fly tying and other outdoor pursuits.

As the fly-tying instructor in two winter sessions and one summer session, Ken Snyder, 71, has only been teaching women how to tie a fly in a BOW event for a couple of years. He'd heard of the program more than a decade ago, but didn't participate as an instructor until the previous fly-tying instructor asked him to fill in for her so she could take a fishing trip to Mexico.

"I am amazed and excited and impressed by how many different programs they have for the women," Snyder said of the BOW events.

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From left, cross country ski instructor Frida Waara shows Indianapolis resident Camille James, 39, how to put on skis before heading out to the trail. (Journal photo by Jackie Stark)



Wilderness First Aid instructor Mike Knack, assisted by Cindy Peck, hoists up participant Laura Calandra after wrapping her in a makeshift body-board, constructed from tree limbs, rope and a tarp. (Photo courtesy of Cindy Peck)



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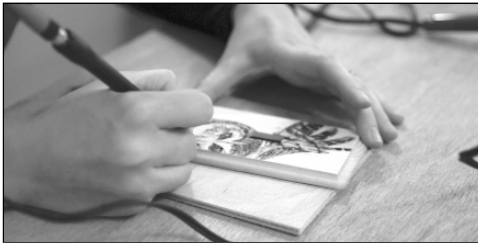
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BECOMING AN OUTDOORS-WOMAN



Sally Wenczel of Ferndale, is wood burning during a class at the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in Michigan event. (Journal photo by Matt Keiser)



Above, a close-up view of Sally Wenczel of Ferndale, working on a wood-burning project. (Journal photo by Matt Keiser)



Above, Julianne Armijo of Ypsilanti helps harness Walnut during the sled dog course. Women learned how to properly lead a sled dog team and were given a chance to try it first hand as they mushed on a short course around the camp. Below, back-country cooking instructor Cathy Pederson checks on a “pudgy pie” during class. Participants learned how to pack for and cook on a backcountry trip, including how to make the pies, which typically include a variation of meat and cheese, melted over a hot fire. (Journal photos by Jackie Stark)

Classes keep participants busy learning new skills

By JACKIE STARK
Journal Staff Writer

BIG BAY — With a total of 16 classes to choose from, women attending this year’s winter Becoming and Outdoors-Woman in Michigan event were offered everything from back-country skiing to out-of-the box recycling techniques.

Three class session times were scheduled over the weekend, which left the women with plenty of classes to take should they decide to return to Bay Cliff Health Camp — where Michigan BOW events take place — for next year’s winter courses.

Indianapolis resident Camille James, 39, traveled farther than any other BOW participant this year. The more than 650 mile trek took her through lower Michigan, with a quick stop to visit family before heading up to Big Bay.

James took courses in cross country skiing, building winter shelters and snowshoeing.

Snowshoeing instructors Sue Petschke and Sandy Kivela showed

participants the different types of snowshoes, along with how to choose the appropriate snowshoe before tak-

burning or pyrography class taught by BOW instructor Angel Portice, a professional whose work has been dis-

“It’s fun. The instructors and also the people you’re with, the other participants, make it fun and a comfortable environment to try it in. And I’m not just saying that — it really is. I was doing the snowshoeing and I had to slow down, I had to stop and rest a few times and one of the instructors hung back with the slower group, so that was really nice.”

— CAMILLE JAMES, participant, Indianapolis

ing the classes on winter hikes through the beautiful woods surrounding the camp.

“It’s fun,” James said of the weekend. “The instructors and also the people you’re with, the other participants, make it fun and a comfortable environment to try it in. And I’m not just saying that — it really is. I was doing the snowshoeing and I had to slow down, I had to stop and rest a few times and one of the instructors hung back with the slower group, so that was really nice.”

Other women enrolled in a wood-

played in number of galleries in the Midwest — including in Marquette’s own Arts and Culture Center inside the Peter White Public Library.

Portice showed her class the different instruments used in pyrography, and helped them master basic techniques such as simple shading or hand-writing.

As one of Portice’s classes was busy making wooden creations to take home, another group of women was just a few feet away, standing around

See Classes p. 4



Instructor has much ‘self confidence’

By JACKIE STARK
Journal Staff Writer

BIG BAY — “Get back,” Jane Gordon yells as she levels a punch to the chest of her assailant.

The crowd of women watching pay attention to Gordon’s stance and how she holds her fist, remembering what their instructor does so they’ll be ready when it’s their turn to attempt to bring down their other teacher, Mike Knack.

As the self-confidence instructor at the winter Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in Michigan event — held from Feb. 22-24 at Bay Cliff Health Camp — Gordon is not easily intimidated by men.

“I worked with all men pretty much my whole career as a conservation officer (with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources),” Gordon said. “I was the only female in the U.P. for the longest time. I was the only female and guys didn’t want to work with me. They’d put three guys in a pickup truck so I didn’t have to have a partner because they didn’t want to work with me because I was a female.”

She said the event, which she has been a part of since its inception in Michigan in

1998, removes that element of competition that men often bring to the table, and allows women to learn about the outdoors without feeling like they have to be the best at something, or not even try.

“Men are very competitive and they want to do better, they want to beat, they want to shoot one better,” Gordon said. “Women are so enveloping that, when she does good, I’m happy for her. I don’t care how I do. She did good so I’m going to cheer for her, and if I do good, that’s OK too ...

“(BOW events are) just so much about camaraderie and about everybody succeeding, and with men, you don’t get that,” Gordon said. “That’s just how they’re wired. It’s not a bad thing. I’m not saying it’s a bad thing. It’s just how they are.”

Though BOW events typically use female instructors, some male instructors also participate, but Gordon said the guys don’t take that competitive force to class. And learning from a man you don’t necessarily know is much easier than learning from a husband, or boyfriend, she added.

“Trying to learn something from a male significant other, it can be a



Instructor Jane Gordon explains the proper way to hold your fist during a self defense class at a Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in Michigan event held Feb. 23 at Bay Cliff Health Camp in Big Bay. (Journal photo by Matt Keiser)

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BECOMING AN OUTDOORS-WOMAN

First timers learn together at BOW



Above left, Melanie Dara, 56, Nancy Greenia, 58, and Meg Coughlin, 63, sit together at breakfast during the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman event held at Bay Cliff Health Camp. Greenia and Coughlin were participating in the event for the first time. Above right, Dara, of downstate Shelby Township, glues pieces of fur together during a class on recycling. Dara participated in a BOW event in Maryland 17 years ago, but hasn't been a part of one since. (Journal photos by Jackie Stark and Matt Keiser)

By JACKIE STARK
Journal Staff Writer

BIG BAY — “How many people are here for the first time?” asked Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in Michigan organizer Sharon Pitz, a Department of Natural Resources employee, during the event’s introduction Feb. 22.

Looking out across the benches, a number of hands were raised in the air, including those of longtime friends Meg Coughlin, of Rochester, and Nancy Greenia, of Royal Oak.

The two had come to Bay Cliff Health Camp — the site of Michigan BOW events — with Greenia’s friend, Melanie Dara, of Shelby Township. Dara had attended a BOW event 17 years ago in Maryland, and had first brought up the idea of going to the Michigan BOW weekend, convincing Greenia to attend. Greenia, in turn,

convinced Coughlin to come along.

Dara and Coughlin met for the first time at the event.

The weekend offers women of all ages a chance to learn outdoors skills in a worry-free environment that is catered to beginners, with 16 courses available this year over three scheduled class periods.

“I’m always one to do something different,” Dara, 56, said. “Sometimes I think I do it, like, someone will say, ‘Oh, I could never do that.’ It’s a challenge for me to go and do it then.”

“That’s the one thing we all have in common, the three of us,” Greenia, 58, said.

A self-professed “city rat” Greenia was anxious about the weekend when she first arrived on campus. But she found the BOW atmosphere helped put her at ease.

“I’m a city girl, and that’s exact-

ly how I was feeling,” Greenia said. “I am totally out of my comfort zone, but it’s OK, because I’m around all women, and women are very supportive.”

Enrolling in geocaching, snowshoeing and cross country skiing, Coughlin, 63, said she was incredibly impressed by the instructors, something all three women agreed on.

“What I enjoyed more than the activities was meeting these instructors,” Coughlin said. “They were all very interesting and so dedicated, so up, and they’re excellent instructors.”

“I was just ... saying, they’re AOWs,” Greenia said, laughing. “They’re Already Outdoors-Women...”

“You learn so much, it’s just amazing, and it’s not just the class. These women are phenomenal.”

Both Coughlin and Greenia,

who had also enrolled in cross country skiing, were most impressed by ski instructor Frida Waara, who has skied at both the north and south pole, and whose entire family is avid winter outdoors enthusiasts.

Dara said her husband is ready for her return home as an outdoors-woman, so the two can venture outside together more often.

“My husband’s hoping,” Dara said. “He bought me all the snow gear. He’s really hoping I’ll go with him.”

The idea of a weekend of outdoors instruction offered for women by women was what ultimately drew the trio from downstate Michigan to the snowy north woods of the Upper Peninsula.

“I wouldn’t have gone to a camp (with men) because the men would take over the class. It’s that

testosterone thing,” Dara said. “It’s almost like I get to go to Girl Scout camp. I was an instructor in Girl Scout camp. Now it’s my turn to be the kid.”

“I like learning with a group of women,” Coughlin said. “It’s very supportive. There’s not a lot of competition. You’re just out to have a good time, to stretch yourself. It’s great...”

“You know what I was really excited about? The average age of the women here was quite old,” Coughlin added. “I thought it was so cool that there were so many women who were willing to try outdoor activities.”

Most of the weekend’s participants ranged in age from 30 to 50.

All three women said after attending this BOW event, they’ll be looking to return in

See First p. 4

Mother, daughter work to challenge each other

By JACKIE STARK
Journal Staff Writer

BIG BAY — With a total of 23 Becoming an Outdoors-Woman events between them, mother-daughter pair Rosemary and Chris Plourde can certainly be considered veterans of the program.

“I like it, especially for Mom,” Chris, 33, said. “I think it makes the other women feel more comfortable, that it’s just women, that no one’s watching them. We’re all in the same boat. We’re like a BOW family. You don’t have to worry about getting embarrassed.”

Rosemary, an assistant accountant for the Marquette Area Public Schools district, and Chris, a nurse at the Norlite Nursing Center, talk about past BOW programs with a sense of nostalgia, relating stories of participating in a self-defense class while Chris was four-months pregnant and canoeing as fast as they could back to shore as a storm came rolling in over Lake Independence.

“One year we did rock climbing, and I spent two hours on the side of this rock, determined to get to the top,” Chris said.

“And you did, too,” Rosemary, 58, said. “It had rained the night before, so you’ve got to add that too. It was slippery and the instructors weren’t sure how well it would go because the rock was wet. I made it about a foot off the ground.”

But it wasn’t just Chris who accomplished something that day.

“You could go up on top of the rock, there was a path around, and we had to rappel down, but they wouldn’t show us how high it was,” Chris said. “She (Rosemary) rappels down and then she looks up and says ‘I would



Rosemary Plourde, left, stands with her daughter, Chris, just before heading out for a nighttime snowshoe at Bay Cliff Health Camp during the winter Becoming an Outdoors-Woman in Michigan event. The Plourdes have been participating in BOW events together for years. (Journal photo by Jackie Stark)

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BECOMING AN OUTDOORS-WOMAN

Ice fishing 101: Just the basics



Instructors Matt Korpi, left, and Justin Farley, right, show participant Julianne Armijo how to operate ice-fishing equipment during the morning ice fishing session on Lake Independence in Big Bay. (Journal photo by Matt Keiser)

Defense from 2

not go well. I have experienced (that). Trying to learn golf didn't end well," Gordon said. "We try to get female instructors. We have male instructors - but the male instructors are not significant others."

The friendly environment fostered by the instructors - who volunteer their time and expertise - and participants alike is one reason why Gordon continues to return to BOW as an instructor.

She also enjoys the chance to visit the Upper Peninsula once again. Working for the DNR, Gordon was stationed in the Marquette area for some time before she transferred to Lansing. She retired in 2011.

Even without the BOW, helping foster a love for the outdoors is a huge driving force in Gordon's life.

"I just loved teaching people about the outdoors," Gordon said. "I love other

people to love the outdoors and to love nature, to get out as much as I do, so if you can share that with other people, that's a gift, right?"

Outside of BOW programs, Gordon helps lead outdoor activities for kids, taking middle-schoolers on a river canoe trip and helping out at both the boys and girls camps at her church.

"I brought a whole new dimension to the all-girls camp at church," Gordon said. "When I got there, they said, 'OK, what can you teach, Jane, cooking, sewing, knitting, crocheting?' I'm like, 'No, no and no, but I can teach them ... outdoor survival, wilderness survival.' This year, for the first (time) I'm going to teach hunter safety to our all-girl camp."

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First from 3

the future.

"When I first came up here, I thought, 'Oh my God, what did I get myself into,' because I am one to do new things, but then, sometimes reality hits on what you signed up to do," Greenia said. "This was re-

ally good for me and, anyways, it gave me an experience in overcoming some of my fears and trying new things. And I got to meet a lot of women. It's just so empowering."

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Pair from 3

never do that if I had to know how high it really was.' That's one of my favorite stories."

"But you know what though, that was the funnest

thing, rappelling," Rosemary said.

That's often how these BOW events work for the duo - each pushes the other to challenge themselves in ways they never thought possible.

"I make Mom adventur-

ous, but she in turn makes me artistic," Chris said with a smile before turning to her mother. "You get anxiety about skiing. I get anxiety about wood burning."

"But, she neglects to say that whatever she makes turns out good," Rosemary

added.

Since taking the snowshoeing class in a previous BOW event, Chris said she goes snowshoeing four times a week with her mom. And the pair have also started a traditional late-night snowshoe at 9:30

p.m. at each winter BOW event.

"We try to get as many people to go as we can," Chris said.

A mother of two young girls, Chris said she's hoping to some day make the BOW events a three-genera-

tional activity.

"Hopefully one of them will come," Chris said. "It will be a BOW first."

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Instructor from 1

As a former president of the Fred Waara Trout Unlimited Chapter, Snyder's expertise is in trout flies, having taught trout fly tying classes as part of Trout Unlimited for a number of years. But after being asked by women at a BOW event about fly fishing for other types of fish, he added a variation of flies to the class.

"Normally, if you're a part of Trout Unlimited and

you teach fly tying, you mainly specify our work in trout flies, but last year, I was sitting at a table at lunch and one of the ladies said, 'Could you teach flies for pan fish, like blue gills and bass,' and I said, 'Sure,'" Snyder said. "I did three ties (in class) for blue gill, and one for small mouth bass and we did three trout. That came about because of somebody asking, 'Hey, can we do that?'"

Snyder said the U.P. has more fishermen than fishermen, but the women tend

to be better at fly-tying.

"The women are very, very good at it, I think simply because many of them like sewing or are familiar with it," Snyder said. "I think their hands are smaller and they can handle the material. The women are very good fly-tiers, they really are. In fact, (in class) we got six flies tied in three hours and that is a record."

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Classes from 2

a camp stove, learning how to cook in the back country.

Instructors Cathy Pederson and Gretta Steele showed a small group of women how to pack lightweight nutritious and delicious food for a trip into the backwoods.

Southfield resident Jan Wanetick, 63, said she signed up for the class because she's planning a 45-day, roughly 600-mile

kayak trip for later in the year.

With the trip in mind, she also enrolled in the wilderness first-aid course, where she learned how to make an improvised backboard and body splint, among other things.

Also offered was a basic course on cross country skiing, where expert skiers Frida Waara and John Anderton taught women about the different types of skis, ski wax and ski boots before heading out to a freshly groomed trail.

Both instructors are well-accomplished, with Anderton winning several skiing competitions and Waara having skied at both the north and south poles.

"(Skiing) is something that connects you to the landscape," Waara said. "When you connect to the winter landscape, you are truly forever changed."

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BOW from 1

es when openings are available, engendering in her a deep love for the program.

"I had never, ever been out on the ice, because I'm scared to death to go on the ice," Pitz said.

But the BOW instructors convinced her to head out and conquer her own fears.

"I had a life jacket on and poles, and they all went out with me ... they said, 'There's a foot of snow, there's a foot of ice here,'" she said. "I was so, so nervous. I didn't think I'd be

that nervous - but I overcame that."

Pitz said she's also learned how to snowmobile, kayak, cross country ski and rock climb through BOW events.

According to Pitz, the BOW program began in Wisconsin and Michigan summer courses were first offered in 1998. Winter courses began in 2003.

As the years went on, the program grew in popularity, with people coming from all across the Midwest for a weekend getaway in the northwoods.

Minnesota, Indiana, Illinois and lower Michigan

were all represented at the Feb. 22-24 BOW event. Women also came from Escanaba, Iron Mountain, Vulcan, Kingsford and Marquette, just to name a few U.P. towns.

They came for the chance to learn a few skills they've never had, or to practice things they haven't done in years.

Some tried cross country skiing for the first time in their lives, or took up snowshoeing again after decades. Some learned how to create wood-burnings while others learned the basics of back-country cooking.

All of them were taught by

knowledgeable instructors who work for free.

"Our instructors totally volunteer their time," Pitz said. "They don't get paid to do this. They come out of the goodness of their hearts."

"We've had awesome instructors. They dedicate their time for this weekend, just to make sure the women learn what they want to learn and are happy when they leave. We don't want someone to not be happy. We want them to have a good experience."

With three class periods available over the weekend at this winter's event, the

women also had time to do things on their own. They went out for a late-night snowshoe at 9:30 p.m. or sat around a bonfire overlooking the shores of Lake Superior. They took saunas, received massages and participated in Zumba.

Pitz said the events create an atmosphere that is meant to make the women feel comfortable, even as they go beyond their comfort zones. Each program is \$180, which pays for lodging, meals and classes.

A silent auction also takes place during some BOW events, the proceeds of

which are used to help less fortunate people attend through a scholarship program.

This year's Michigan BOW summer courses will take place from May 31 to June 2. Previous summer programs have included classes on shooting, canoeing, wilderness survival and making walking sticks.

For more information on the Michigan BOW, visit www.michigan.gov/bow.

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